

# Teacher Autonomy in Modifying Learning Outcomes

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The NCF-FS aims to transform the learning experiences of children in the Foundational Stage by defining clear standards of learning. The approach to Learning Outcomes (LOs) is that children progress

towards the attainment of competencies at their own pace. This is a major shift from all the earlier policies of a pre-determined, class-/grade-wise pace of learning.

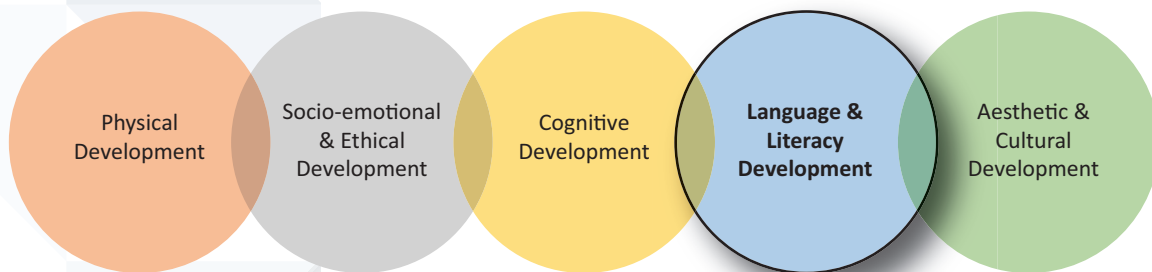


Figure 1. The five domains of development.

Let us understand this with the help of an example from the domain of language and literacy development with the following curriculum goal and LOs.

## CG-10: Children develop fluency in reading and writing in Language 1

While oral language development happens naturally through a process of socialisation and immersion in a language environment, written language is a cultural artefact and there is not[hing] natural about it. Children need explicit instruction in making connection between the oral language they have acquired with the writing system (the script) for that language. This begins with recognising that we use words that contain meaning and these words are further split into sounds that are represented as symbols in the script. While the script reading and writing requires explicit instruction, meaning-making should not be postponed till end of learning all aksharas (letters) of the script.

### C-10.1: Learning Outcomes

	A	B	C	D	E
	<b>C-10.1: Develops phonological awareness and blends phonemes/ syllables into words and segment words into phonemes/ syllables in L1</b>				
	<b>← Ages 3 - 8 →</b>				
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sings rhymes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies rhyming words and alliterations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces rhyming words and alliterations</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mimics and reproduces syllabic sounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifies the beginning and end syllables in words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breaks down syllables into their consonant and vowel sounds</li> </ul>		
3		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combines 2-3 syllables to form simple words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Combines sounds (vowel and consonant) to form the most familiar words</li> </ul>		

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Section 1.1.4 Language and Literacy Development. pp. 260-261

Note: As per NCF-FS, L1 is the home language/ mother tongue/ familiar language (p. 62). The NCF-FS recommended that L1 should be preferred as the medium of instruction. In case L1 is not the medium of instruction, it must be used in the oral domain as far as possible and for smooth transition to other languages. To know more, refer to NCF-FS's approach to language education and literacy in the Foundational Stage (pp. 76-79).

This example represents the five stages of development (from A to E) possible for the attainment of this competency. The LOs for all competencies are represented in this way.

### Teacher's autonomy and classroom context

The NCF-FS clearly states that curriculum developers and teachers must have the autonomy to design LOs keeping in mind the classroom contexts, so long as these map to the Competencies (NCF-FS 2022, p. 51). State educational institutions, like SCERTs, which are engaged in curriculum development are focusing more on working at the level of LOs.

This means that a teacher has the freedom to modify the LOs for the above-mentioned competency on phonological awareness based on her classroom context. Let us take the example of Dipika, who teaches in a disadvantaged neighbourhood and

has a mixed-grade classroom of children who are 3-6 years old, where English is the medium of instruction.

Dipika reimagines these LOs related to the competency of phonological awareness for her children by considering the following factors:

- The interest exhibited earlier by children in noticing and playing with a variety of environmental sounds.
- Integrating few LOs from another competency that belongs to the domain of cognitive development (C-2.3: Differentiates sounds by their pitch, volume and sound patterns by their pitch, volume, and tempo).
- The specific steps that children may need to take to attain the ability to break words into syllables, considering that her children need additional support for attainment of competencies related to language and literacy.
- Dipika's own recent familiarity with additional phonological awareness activities that were demonstrated by Resource Persons at a district-level workshop on foundational literacy.

Table 1. Dipika's modification of LOs for her class.

	A	B	C	D	E
	<b>C-10.1: Develops phonological awareness and blends phonemes/syllables into words and segment words into phonemes/syllables in L1</b>				
	← Ages 3 - 8 →				
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices environmental sounds (e.g., sounds of different animals and birds)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notices and produces environmental sounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces variations of environmental sounds in different contexts (e.g., gentle breeze, strong winds, stormy clouds)</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys the rhythm of rhymes and songs and their rhyming words</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces rhyming words (includes nonsense words)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces short rhymes (2-3 lines) with support</li> </ul>	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognises individual words in a sentence through actions (e.g., clapping, jumping, and banging the desk)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaks spoken two-syllable words into syllables (e.g., their name, table, dustbin, etc.) through actions (e.g., clapping, jumping, and banging the desk)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaks spoken 2-3 syllable words into syllables (e.g., their name, bottle, computer, butterfly, etc.) through actions (e.g., clapping, jumping, and banging the desk)</li> </ul>	

- Interest expressed by a few community members (primarily college students) in supporting Dipika in the classroom by singing rhymes and songs in the local language(s) and playing musical instruments.
- As the competency presents the option of working at the syllable level and not at the phoneme<sup>i</sup> level, Dipika decides to introduce phonemes to her children at a later stage, perhaps after tracking their progress when it comes to words and syllables.

### Rethinking pedagogy and assessment

Continuing with the example shared above, Dipika plans specific learning experiences or activities

for her children. She understands that all children cannot progress along a fixed sequence of activities, so she takes a more differentiated approach – some activities where the whole class can be involved and some where the specific needs of children are kept in mind without labelling or segregating them.

In the 7-8 minutes Dipika allots for phonological awareness activities every day, she develops a rough plan as follows, involving a few of the LOs mentioned above and more from other domains, such as following instructions, sensorial development, helping each other, and taking turns, etc.

Earlier, Dipika informally included the local language(s) for either fun through rhymes and songs

Table 2. Dipika's plan for activities in her class.

Whole class/ small groups	Nature of the learning experience/ activity	How Dipika tracks children's involvement and progress
Whole class	<p>Warm-up games related to noticing and producing environmental sounds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close your eyes and notice the sounds in the environment</li> <li>• (Blindfolded) identify/recognise the sources of different environmental sounds</li> <li>• Imagine sounds in different scenarios, e.g., flying like a bird in the sky, caught in heavy rain, or underwater</li> <li>• Reproduce the sounds heard using own voice or objects in the surroundings</li> </ul>	<p>All the children in Dipika's class have attained the LOs related to noticing and producing environmental sounds, so her purpose of retaining the activities for the same are to warm-up children to more challenging phonological awareness activities.</p> <p>Dipika does not record anything unless there is a specific incident involving a child or a few children which she would like to put down as an anecdotal record.</p>
Whole class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Singing of rhymes and songs in the local language(s) and English</li> <li>• Word play: Listening to and repeating tongue twisters in the local language(s)</li> </ul>	<p>The complexity of the rhymes and songs are such that all children can sing them. Dipika takes the associated LOs and breaks them down further to design a checklist, where she tracks the progress of all children by observing a few of them every week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sings along with familiar rhymes/songs. (Yes/No)</li> <li>• Demonstrates some understanding of rhythm through body movement/ singing rhythmically. (Yes/No)</li> <li>• Expresses a preference for certain rhymes/songs, e.g., makes suggestions or expresses agreement/disagreement when a rhyme/song is chosen. (Yes/No)</li> <li>• Displays signs of joy while participating, e.g., stands with others even when not singing, sings along, looks intently, moves body etc. (Yes/No)</li> </ul>
Small groups (not segregated)	<p>Language games related to breaking familiar words from the local language(s) and English into syllables (may or may not be borrowed from the rhymes/songs above). For example, by listening to the word or seeing its picture.</p> <p>Children who do it independently are given 2-3 syllable words and children who need more support are given two-syllable words only – they also repeat what another child or the teacher demonstrate.</p>	<p>Dipika does not create any separate assessment tool for tracking the progress of children regarding breaking words into syllables. She uses the modified table of LOs as a rubric, marking the names of children against the LOs they achieve.</p>

or for explanation. She felt compelled to only use English for formal teaching, as it is the medium of instruction in her school. With the help of the new learning standards, she realises the significance of formally including children’s language(s), at least in the oral domain. Dipika plans to formally include more rhymes, songs, tongue-twisters, and words from the local language(s) to not only develop her students’ phonological awareness but also other aspects of language and literacy.<sup>ii</sup> Children are involved in more language games where they help and support each other in heterogenous/mixed groups instead of being isolated from the rest of the class. The LOs from the domain of language and literacy are integrated with those from other domains for holistic development. In terms of assessment, no separate tests are required; Dipika

uses a variety of tools and techniques to record the progress of her children.

### Summary

It is important to establish clear learning standards for the Foundational Stage so that teachers, parents, and school leaders understand how children in this age group develop and learn. This approach focuses on developing broad competencies that children should achieve by the end of the Foundational Stage, providing a framework for a holistic and individualised learning experience. While the example of Dipika illustrates how individual teachers can effectively implement the learning standards in their classrooms, state educational institutions are encouraged to design curricular material that accommodate the learning standards to facilitate implementation on the ground.

### Endnotes

- i Phonemes are the smallest units of sounds in speech. For example, the words ‘cat’, ‘kite’, and ‘duck’ contain the phoneme /k/. Understanding the correspondence between phonemes and graphemes (the smallest unit in a writing system, e.g., letters/*aksharas*) is known as ‘decoding’, an essential literacy skill for reading whole words.
- ii Whenever children’s L1 are not used officially as the language for teaching other subjects, they should still be used formally, at least in the oral domain, and at the initial stages of learning to read and write and serve as a bridge to the language used for teaching other subjects. (NCF-FS 2023, p. 77). Read more in Section 3.2 NCF’s Approach to Language Education and Literacy in the Foundational Stage (pp. 76-80).

### References

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